



Left, Tony Anthony of the Shinnecock Indian Nation gives casting pointers.

I Love Fishing!

story & photos
by Emily M. Grey

Imagine yourself and your family as resident immigrants in a foreign land. You cannot yet speak the language or understand the local customs. You and your family enjoy fishing, though you do so primarily for subsistence. It will take time to become acclimated and learn local and state regulations. In your homeland, fishing laws were nonexistent or not enforced. How do you want to be treated, especially if you unintentionally break the law?

Understanding each other's language, of course, can be challenging to multicultural anglers and conservation police officers. And body language sends a powerful message that can allay or further complicate a situation. Everyone picks up on a smile or a frown.

Mexican-born tomato field worker Francisco Sanchez and his 10-year-old son Edgar love to fish. Last summer a wonderful day turned south at Guard Shore, a popular bayside spot in Accomack County on the Eastern Shore. A local law enforcement officer detained Sanchez, labeling his picture

identification card issued by the Consulate of Mexico as "questionable"—which resulted in the issuance of a citation and a trip to court. Upon examining the defendant's passport and phoning the Mexican Consulate, the judge eventually dismissed the case. After this harrowing episode, Sanchez says that he has reservations about going fishing again.

"People are working to try to make a better life for themselves and their families," says retired conservation police officer (CPO) Bruce Lemmert about Hispanics. "They are looking for something to do and a place to go. They don't have a lot of money. Fishing is recreation and provides food to cook. Some people are really struggling. They open their wallets and show their green card and five or ten dollars, their whole worldly possessions.

"With a lot of resident fishermen, there is a resentment factor, especially when Hispanics use nets as they do in their home country," he continues. "Some local people report Hispanic fishermen who are using a pole as not having a license when they actually do."

Good Samaritans like Joe McKnight, pastor of Hollies Baptist Church in Kellar, have reached out to the Hispanic community.



Above, Chris proudly shows the sunfish he caught at Burke Lake. On page 10, a family prepares to go crabbing at Guard Shore, a popular beach on the bayside.

Laptops, software, and a rent-free parsonage are among his church's gifts to local Hispanic missions. Every July, his church holds a fishing day when anglers harvest croaker, trout, and other bay bounty and fry them to perfection for a hungry crowd. In his free time, Pastor Joe takes Hispanics fishing aboard his boat.

"I like taking people out and watching them catch fish for the first time," McKnight explains. "I enjoy how they appreciate the Eastern Shore and seeing nature through their eyes. The Hispanic culture has done far more for me than I could ever do for them."

Law Enforcement Perspective

Previously assigned to the district of Loudoun, Fairfax, and Prince William counties, former CPO Bruce Lemmert has frequently witnessed people of different cultures sport fishing in Northern Virginia. On warm weather weekends, the shores of Burke Lake in Fairfax County resemble a meeting of the United Nations, with families of Middle Eastern, Southeast Asian, and other descent casting lines along the bank. But because an ethnic count is not taken, it is impossible to know how many nationalities purchase Virginia fishing licenses annually.

"The Hispanic community is from all over: South America, Mexico, and Central America. It's an ongoing process of new people coming in," Lemmert acknowledges. "As with anything new, officers are feeling their way along, enforcing the law, and trying to educate.

"For the most part, people do not want to be in trouble and show respect," he continues about Hispanics. "They come to court when issued a citation and want to pay their fines. They are trying to comply and accommodate to our unique system of rules, regulations, and licenses, which can be complex."

"Interacting with Hispanics and dealing with fishing from a law enforcement perspective is a challenge," agrees CPO Sgt. Steve Garvis, based on Virginia's Eastern Shore. "First, there's the language barrier. Very few speak English, which makes field contacts very difficult. Often, Department (DGIF)



Left, now-retired CPO Bruce Lemmert examines Ramon Gomez's fishing license.

Related Demographics and Trends

Hispanics are officially our nation's largest minority group. Comprising 15 percent of the U.S. population, they represent 7 percent of the commonwealth's approximately 8 million residents.

Hispanic migrant workers are essential to the Eastern Shore's agriculture industry. They account for a respective 10 and 7 percent of Accomack and Northampton counties' population; as such, Hispanics are the area's most readily visible ethnic group.

The "Special Report on Fishing and Boating" conducted by the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation and the Outdoor Foundation provides detailed information on participation by ethnicity, gender, age, education, income, and geographic region. Among the key findings is that in 2008 Hispanic participants made more than 45.8 million annual outings. Hispanic youth aged 6 to 12 have the highest participation among all age groups (19.5%) followed by ages 13 to 17 (16.4%). The most prevalent barrier to this recreation cited by Hispanics is lack of time (53.3%) followed by a perceived lack of access to fishing areas (17%).

Dr. Qian Cai, Director of Demographics and Workforce at the Weldon Cooper Center of the University of Virginia, has done extensive research on Hispanic immigrants and citizens in Virginia. Her research discloses that the majority of the estimated 570,000 Hispanics in Virginia are U.S. citizens. The American Community Survey of 2009 identified a total of 265,000 Hispanic foreign-born individuals.

Not surprisingly, adult citizens achieve more economically and educationally than the overall population. They are well represented in all occupational sectors; particularly, the military.

To reduce costs, Hispanic immigrants, both authorized and unauthorized, tend to pool and share resources with family and non-family members. Over generations, Hispanic citizens and immigrants do well with cultural

Purchasing Licenses

Convenient ways to buy saltwater and freshwater fishing licenses in Virginia:

- Online: www.dgif.virginia.gov/licenses
- Call 1-866-721-6911 (M–F, 8 A.M.–5 P.M., except holidays).
- In person: There are hundreds of license agents throughout the state.
- Mail: Download and print the proper form at (www.dgif.virginia.gov/licenses) and mail to the address provided.

For current fishing regulations and angling opportunities, visit:

- Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries www.dgif.virginia.gov/fishing/regulations
- Virginia Marine Resources Commission/Saltwater license www.mrc.virginia.gov/regulations/swrecfishingrules.shtm

officers are not able to establish an effective dialogue or make the basic requests required to check for a fishing license or creel limits.

"Second, there's a cultural difference in conservation concepts," Garvis continues. "In my experience, Hispanics view fishing and crabbing from a subsistence-level rather than recreational approach. I have observed little to no understanding of seasonal creel limits, species size limits, or license requirements."

"When necessary in the field, we call a court translator who translates over the cell phone or a child in a fishing party often speaks English," adds CPO Travis Murray, also assigned to the Eastern Shore.

In response to such challenges, the

Department now incorporates a "Spanish for Law Enforcement" class as part of its training academy. Many CPOs volunteer to take Spanish classes through their local community college as a way to improve their communications skills. And, on DGIF-managed access areas (boat landings and fishing piers) frequented by Hispanics, the DGIF posts management rules in both English and Spanish.

The communications gap is not unique to Virginia, of course. Conservation officers in the Province of Quebec, for example, hand out small leaflets to anglers that are printed in nine languages. This handy guide succinctly provides local fishing information—including where to obtain a license.



Kwang Dyung and son John, formerly from South Korea, love to fish.

and socio-economic assimilation. English proficiency improves among Hispanics with each year spent in the U.S., while traditions and cultural values continue to influence their way of life.

A University of Massachusetts Department of Forestry and Wildlife 1998 study addresses the role of demographics and the constraints of minority group participation in recreational fishing. According to that study, between 1995 and 2025, 78 percent of the net change in the U.S. population will be attributed to minority members. This, in turn, will influence participation and expenditures in fisheries activities and affect fisheries management.

Policy

The Virginia Employment Commission reports that our state's Hispanic population will double between 2006 and 2030, resulting from births and immigration. Understanding this population composition and characteristics can furnish a factual framework for policy considerations.

Recognizing population trends can help agencies successfully recruit new participants and become more efficient in providing more opportunities and services to a growing number of minority constituents. Managers must

realize that they can no longer focus solely on the interest of the traditional angling client.

"We have been looking for new constituents in our agency," Lemmert says. "Hispanics are a new group knocking on our door. They are very valuable potential constituents to us. I think they want to enjoy the outdoors. Anyone with family values we can definitely use in our system."

That may be an understatement. Still, many law enforcement officers throughout our state and country relate to the opinion of CPO Sgt. Garvis who says, "I view our challenge as conservation officers as: How do we effectively enforce natural resource laws and teach a recreational conservation concept to an increasingly diverse population of future hunters, anglers, and outdoor enthusiasts?"

"It boils down to individuals showing a welcoming hand," Lemmert concludes. "Hispanics are going to affect the future of wildlife in this state and this country. It would be in our best interest to make them have a positive experience without violating our laws. Hopefully, our sportsmen will help them." ❧

Emily M. Grey is a writer, photographer, naturalist, and attorney from Virginia's Eastern Shore. Her passions are nature, traveling, and interacting with varied cultures.

RESOURCES

- The Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to increase participation in recreational angling and boating, thereby protecting and restoring the nation's aquatic natural resources. It helps people discover, share, and protect the legacy of boating and fishing through national outreach programs, including the Take Me Fishing™ campaign and Anglers Legacy™.
- To learn about Kids' Fishing Days, check www.HuntFishVA.com. Also, the Virginia Sportfishing & Aquatic Resource Education Program (SAREP) provides incentives that encourage people to get outside and fish.

This article has been posted in Spanish on our website, at www.dgif.virginia.gov/virginia-wildlife/special-feature.asp, thanks to Marisa Sanchez. Born in San Antonio, Texas, Marisa resides on the Eastern Shore with her family and serves the local migrant population as a Baptist missionary.